

Duxbury Clipper, Thursday, February 26, 1981

I Remember The Kennedys

By PRISCILLA HARRIS

Our farm (on High St.) was about 30 miles south of Brookline, on the King's Highway which was the main route to the Cape in those days. My father, a retired minister, was attempting to make a living for himself, his wife and 6 children by raising chickens and vegetables. He also owned a 4 acre cranberry bog, which some years was our main source of income, if the frost held off until after we got the cranberries picked.

During the summer, into our driveway came Pierce Arrows, Studebakers, Marmons, Auburns, Cords and an occasional Rolls Royce. Each was driven by a chauffeur and usually contained a dowager with a pekinese dog in her lap. The chauffeur would come to our kitchen door and ask if we had any eggs, chickens or vegetables to sell, and we usually did. We called them the "rich people." To us they all looked alike and talked alike. They owned homes in several places but they usually summered in our town. Once in a while a chauffeur would have a small boy with him who would sit upright in the front seat and not get out of the car. We would feel sorry for him. Sometimes a nursemaid would accompany a child or two, but they never got out of the cars either. I used to think that rich people had few children, and that those they had lived completely apart from them. My mother didn't like rich people much because she loved children and thought they should be allowed to run around and have fun, and that their parents should spend more time with them.

One day a Rolls Royce came into our driveway driven by a chauffeur with a nice-looking reddish haired man sitting next to him. The 2 back doors flew open and out came several children with a pretty, dark-haired woman who obviously was not a nursemaid. The man came to the kitchen door and asked my mother if we had any eggs and vegetables. He bought a tremendous amount of everything we had and tipped his hat to my mother when he left. The children had been running around having fun while being carefully watched by their mother. They scurried back into the huge black car and it slid away.

To us they were an anachronism. They were obviously rich people but they had a lot of children whom they allowed to be with them.

The following Saturday the chauffeur came alone. He had a little black moustache and we figured he was French. He told my mother that he worked for Joseph P. Kennedy, who was a very rich man who owned a movie company. My mother told him that Mr. Kennedy seemed like a very fine man and the fact that he was rich had nothing to do with that. The chauffeur said that Mr. Kennedy was going to help his daughter (the chauffeur's) get into the movies. We children were very impressed but my mother didn't seem to be. He didn't tip his hat when he left.

After that, Mr. Kennedy and the chauffeur came many times during the summer. Mr. Kennedy would come to the back door and the chauffeur would stay in the car. My mother, being Swedish, always had the coffee pot on the back of the kitchen stove, and sometimes when Mr. Kennedy had to wait while we packed up the eggs he would have a cup of coffee with my mother. He always asked how we children were, and once I heard my mother telling him that my younger brother and I had the measles. The next time he came we were playing in the yard. He came up to us and asked if we were the 2 who had had the measles and asked how we were feeling. I felt important to have a rich, movie man ask about my health. When he had gone we ran in to tell our mother and she said it showed the type of fine man he was; to remember that 2 of her children had been sick, when he had so many of his own children to be concerned about.

In our town there were no Irish, but I knew that in Boston there were lots of them. I thought they must be a peculiar type of person from what I heard my father and other people say. They let their lives be run by a man in Rome called the Pope, and if an Irishman ever became President of the United States, the Pope would really run the country. I thought that Boston Irish, and Irish Catholic were hyphenated words, and that about the worst thing a person could be was a Boston Irish Catholic. I got the impression that some day they would swarm over the country and run everything. I heard people say they always went in for being policemen and politicians so they could get control. I heard my father say he would never vote for Al Smith because he was a Catholic. My mother said it didn't matter what a person was, he could still be nice. That is, everybody except Germans. When my father talked about the fact that Boston was full of Irish my mother would say that she would rather have Irish there than Germans. I don't think there were any Germans in our town so I had never met any. Our town was made up of practically all Yankees and we few Swedes were considered by some to be a "foreign element." My father disapproved these Yankees as being ignorant, and ignored them.

After Mr. Kennedy would leave our house my mother would always remark about what a fine person he was. When I think of him, I am reminded of the fact that he was a very fine man, and that he was a very fine man.

eggs, the price of the chickens or something. He never did. He always said things like how good it was to be able to get fresh eggs and chickens for his family, as well as vegetables right out of the garden. You would think we were doing him a big favor, the way he talked. We may have been poor and the Kennedys rich, but one thing we had in common. All summer long we had the same things to eat, at least on weekends.

Quite often the chauffeur would get out of the car and when Mr. Kennedy wasn't looking, he'd tell us who he was driving to Hyannisport for the weekend. Once he said it was Colleen Moore, another time Gloria Swanson's husband, a Marquis. All this certainly added a bit of glamor to our quiet lives, and whenever that big black car rolled into our driveway, one of us children would alert the rest with "The Kennedys are here," and we'd find a vantage point in a window to see who was in the car. We were not allowed to stare so we had to go inside the house to get a good look.

At the end of the summer all the Kennedys would arrive on their way back to Brookline.

I don't know how many years this went on. I remember one day my father's getting a letter from Mr. Kennedy asking if we would like to have a Newfoundland dog. They were going to move from Brookline to New York and he didn't want to put the dog in a kennel because he was used to running free. Also he fought with other dogs. His name was Buddy. We didn't have a dog at the time, and we children urged my father to please tell Mr. Kennedy that we would take Buddy.

One Sunday my father drove to Brookline and we all anxiously awaited his return. Buddy was a huge black creature the likes of which we had never seen except in pictures. He greeted us all like old friends and straightaway became one of the family. It didn't take us long to realize why he wouldn't exactly fit into a kennel situation, however, as he wouldn't stand for another dog being anywhere near him. He arrived with a wide collar with copper studs, and a large metal plate which read "Joe and Jack Kennedy, 131 Naples Rd. Brookline, Mass. Lic. 1276" and more than once that heavy collar saved his life. He would often attack 2 or 3 dogs at once, and usually one of them would go for his throat. Once he and 2 collies held up traffic for miles, having a ferocious fight in the middle of the road. People got out of their cars and watched, and a state policeman pulled out his revolver and would have shot Buddy, except for my pleadings.

Every now and then the Kennedys would come to see Buddy but there was one time that stands out in sharp relief in my memory. It was the first time that Mr. Kennedy brought his 2 oldest sons to see him. Because Buddy was such a fighter the police had ordered us to tie him up, having had several complaints from people who owned lesser dogs. He broke the rope he was tied with more than once, and that day he was attached to his dog house with a chain. My mother told me to show them where Buddy was and I could tell by their expressions they didn't approve of the fact that he was tied. Mr. Kennedy asked me why we kept him tied and I said "Because he beats it every chance he gets." He didn't seem to understand me and asked me to repeat what I had said. Buddy greeted the boys by standing on his hind legs and putting his front paws on their shoulders. There was no doubt that he remembered them. Mr. Kennedy said "Don't let him do that, those were clean shirts this morning." The boys looked very sad when they left. Buddy and I felt they didn't like me at all and that they wanted to take Buddy to Hyannis Port with them. I didn't want to tell them that the police had ordered us to keep him tied because I thought that would give them a good reason to take him back. They were both tall and handsome and in their teens and made me feel very self-conscious. I didn't tell them that we took Buddy for long walks through the woods and that he really had fun, but after they left I wished that I had. Mrs. Kennedy used to call up every now and then through the year to ask how Buddy was. The whole Kennedy family was fond of him, so were we even though he was sometimes a nuisance and made us some enemies among dog owners.

I don't remember how many years the Kennedys stopped at our farm, sometimes the whole family but more often Mr. Kennedy with a variety of people. Once he came with his father and his father-in-law, who had been mayor of Boston. They were both nice friendly men and all waved at us as they drove away. The top was down on the car that day and I remember the sun shining on 2 white heads and one reddish. My mother had remarked once when they arrived for the first time that summer with all the children, "almost every year there's a new baby, and every year Mrs. Kennedy gets prettier." I wonder if there was some connection, but I knew that my mother was very prejudiced where babies were concerned. She used to say that she had never seen a homely baby, and when we tried to point one out to her she would ignore us or tell us to be quiet. She always greeted each new Kennedy baby with great enthusiasm.

After several years the Kennedys stopped coming to our farm and we read in the paper that they had one to live in London. Buddy lived to be a very old dog, and one cold winter night we let him out and he didn't come back. My brother went out looking for him but didn't find him until the next morning. We figured he had died of a heart attack as there wasn't a scratch on him. We had sort of lost track of the Kennedys by then, except for what we read about them in

the papers. My mother wept over their tragedies; the ones she knew about. She would say "Oh no, not that beautiful child!" Of course they weren't children anymore, and neither were we. My mother died before the 2 assassinations, and we were glad she didn't know about them. It might have shaken her great faith in mankind, for where the Kennedys were concerned, as in most other things, she had very strong feelings.